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Alex

.. question to get interest to admit
english predominant. Best situation would
be bilingualism with resp. influence of
1st language. (native) resting with individuals
a commitment

Prospects for Native Language Maintenance

in the Mackenzie Valley

(Abstract)

A Brief to be Presented to the

Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry

Yellowknife, N.W.T.

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by

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*question - Does development have any relevance except by degree?
Isn't the main tenor of first language a personal/community responsibility?*
This presentation to the Inquiry will deal with the potential impact

of large-scale industrial development on the native languages of the Mackenzie Corridor. Restricting attention largely to the Athapaskan languages of the Valley, it will present evidence to show that certain of them (Loucheux, e.g.) are already seriously eroded in the sense that young children are no longer learning them as first languages and are in the process of being abandoned in favor of politically dominant English. Other native languages, Dogrib of Ft. Rae and Lac LaMartre for example, are still vigorously maintained by even the youngest children and show considerable signs of strength in the face of persistent English domination.

Certain factors which serve to encourage as well as to inhibit native language maintenance will be discussed, including the educational process, town vs. bush orientation, and the media. From a review of these factors it will be further argued that, without proper safeguards, the effect of massive development in the Valley will be to hasten the erosion of the native languages and to exacerbate an already tragic situation in which young people are being forced to give up the language of their parents -- as well as the traditions, lore, and pride associated with a knowledge of that language. Certain consequences of this loss of language are discussed.

Arguing that the Dene and Inuit people enjoy a fundamental right to maintain their traditional languages, this presentation will review some of the kinds of basic educational and linguistic groundwork which must be implemented in the course of designing educational programs for the individual languages in order to insure their continued viability. These tasks include the development of practical alphabets for each of the languages, the production of basic literacy materials, and the training of native language



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specialists. These and other measures will require a series of sustained and coordinated efforts by educationalists, linguists, and native people.

Underlying these specific recommendations is a further premise that basic language rights in the North should be a matter of law. Without positively worded guarantees with the force of law we can only expect a continuation of the present situation in which the languages of the Valley are imperiled and, eventually, lost entirely. This consideration leads us, finally, into a discussion of two precedents for language rights legislation: the Official Languages Act of 1971 which enacted wide-ranging measures to protect the status of the French language in Canada, and the Alaska State Bilingual Education Bill of 1972 which did much to further the cause of native bilingual education.

